

Teacher Appreciation Week—Secretary Duncan Writes an Open Letter to Teachers

As a part of Teacher Appreciation Week in May, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in an [open letter to teachers](#), offered praise and appreciation to teachers for their contributions to education.

“You became teachers to make a difference in the lives of children, and for the hard work you do each day, you deserve to be respected, valued, and supported,” the secretary wrote. “I appreciate the challenge and skill involved in the work you do and applaud those of you who have dedicated your lives to teaching.”

Commenting on the challenges teachers face, Secretary Duncan said: “The teachers I have met are not afraid of hard work, and few jobs are harder. Moreover, it’s gotten harder in recent years; the challenges kids bring in to the classroom are greater and the expectations are higher.” Taking notice of the greater challenges teachers face today, Duncan remarked: “Not too long ago, it was acceptable for schools to have high dropout rates, and not all kids were expected to be proficient in every subject. In today’s economy, there is no acceptable dropout rate, and we rightly expect all children—English-language learners, students with disabilities, and children of poverty—to learn and succeed.” For these reasons, teaching is an “honorable and important profession,” indispensable to the quality of the U.S. education system.

New Citizenship Public Education and Awareness Initiative Provides Resources for Adult Education

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Director Alejandro Mayorkas recently announced the launch of the [Citizenship Public Education and Awareness Initiative](#). USCIS serves as an official source of information and resources on citizenship and naturalization. This service helps individuals make informed decisions about citizenship and provides materials and initiatives to support them through the naturalization process.

The new initiative represents USCIS’ growing commitment to inform the public about the benefits of citizenship and how shared citizenship rights and responsibilities unify all Americans. It promotes awareness of the rights, responsibilities and importance of U.S. citizenship, and provides free resources to permanent residents as well as immigrant-serving organizations. Individuals and organizations can learn more about citizenship through the USCIS [Citizenship Resource Center](#)—a one-stop Web portal offering free educational tools. All of the initiative’s materials—including a video public service announcement—are available for download at the links above. Organizations are encouraged to use them in their efforts to reach permanent residents with citizenship information. A [Civics and Citizenship Toolkit](#) is available for eligible organizations, including adult education centers, which must first [register](#) at the toolkit site to receive it.

Regional Educational Laboratory Competition Announced by Institute of Education Sciences

The Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences [intends to award five-year contracts for each of 10](#) regional educational laboratories (RELs) for the period of 2012–17. The primary mission of the RELs is to help states and districts systematically use data and analysis to address important issues of policy and practice to improve student outcomes. Each REL will build research capacity and a knowledge base in its region by:

1. Assessing regional needs to identify a small set of priority topics.
2. Forming partnerships to develop relevant data and analysis projects around actionable questions.
3. Building on federal investments in longitudinal data systems by helping states and districts learn about, use, and augment the data to suit their needs.
4. Providing training and technical assistance about how to embed research and evaluation in ongoing program implementation and decision making.
5. Conducting studies on researchable questions for partnerships, while using these experiences to build regional capacity to adopt these data-based practices.
6. Coordinating with other federally funded technical assistance providers.
7. Disseminating reports, “how to” guides, tools, protocols, and leading indicators.

The expected outcomes are:

1. A cohesive, potentially deep body of knowledge in core, priority areas for each region.
2. Increased use of evaluation, data, and analysis by officials to identify problems, choose programs and strategies, and learn from initiatives.
3. Completion of a range of rigorous studies, methodologically appropriate to their underlying questions.
4. Expansion of state and local capacity to use their own data, conduct high-quality research and evaluation, and incorporate findings into policy and practice.
5. Distribution of REL work across the region, with a transparent, equitable process for REL assistance.
6. Establishment of strong partnerships among practitioners, policy makers, and researchers that are not dependent on ongoing REL support.

Proposals are due by June 29, 2011.